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# AS220 Beat Critique

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# AS220

## BEAT CRITIQUE

Let's get this straight. From the outset I was doubtful, incredulous. You could say that for the three years before I named myself Critic-in-Residence at AS220, I was even less officially functioning as **SKEPTIC-IN-RESIDENCE**. I couldn't believe it. At my first meeting with the **BEATNIK LEAGUE** in August of 1985, they sat around rhapsodizing about generating new ideas, existing as a forum for new ideas sharing new ideas. It transcended the inherent quaintness which I associated with an **ALTERNATIVE SPACE** and rushed headlong into the dangerous depths of deluded naivete. I said "look, this is the eighties. Nobody shares new ideas anymore...they **SELL** them! We live in **THE AGE OF HAUTE CUSINE** dudes, the only new ideas around now are **Bizarro-Nouvelle recipes**. You don't want to get mixed up in that do you?"

So I tried to encourage the artists assembled at AS220 to FORGET THE NEW. Please! It seemed to me there was infinitely more potential in SIFTING THE ASHES OF HIP-PASSE than chasing after some unattainable measure of trendiness. Why not return to the radio-active fallout of modern culture and see how much life might still be left in **THE OLD AND BURNT-OUT**.

Whether or not my advice was ever seriously

taken I will never know. At the time it seemed unlikely...as the premiere evening at AS220 featured a band calling themselves... **NEW AND IMPROVED**.

Never-the-less, after 3 years, the operating motive of the **BEATNIK LEAGUE** is now quite solidly established as socially, aesthetically and even politically **RETRO**. (I mean rilly...where else are you going to hear polite applause for political poetry and bad jazz?)

In three seasons of sorting through atrophied social settings and discarded aesthetic philosophies, those perennial sophomores at AS220 have succeeded in generating something which, although clearly not nouvelle, is certainly distinctive and in a kind of perverse/peculiar way..original.

Unfortunately, it always seems to me that the artists working to define AS220 tend to handicap themselves with concepts. If they aren't emersed in a pipe dream of "exploring the new", well then they are declaring themselves "open" or "un-juried"

Operating with a stated disregard for artistic or professional credentials -the stage at the Beatnik league became the site of a 3 year performance series which careened through every known genre at every imaginable level of competence. More often than not resting in the obscure and unpolished.

These Retro-Beatniks have a nearly paranoid suspicion of gloss. Sure, they say, a slick production is impressive but....."isn't it better to be awkward?"

Maybe it's not a conscious choice, but somehow all of the "in-house" acts spawned or supported by AS220 since 1985 have been decidedly **CLUNKY**. I guess it's meant to be more "human" that way, or maybe it's just that the toujours teen artistes who flesh out their calendar of events are satisfied with cryptic experiments.

WE must remember that a venue which sports coffee-can spotlights cannot afford, either literally or figuratively, to advance itself beyond a certain level of refinement. Too much refinement and you get something verging on a commercial product...and the opportunity to "sell out" could be disastrous for a tribe of declassé bohemians.

In a world where the distinction between **ESTHETIC SAINT** and **ART WHORE** depends on the opportunities presented. The creative community breaks into two considerably less colorful groups, People who have had a chance to sell out, and people who haven't. **AS220 is heaven for people who haven't**. AS220's stage and gallery offer a shelter for artists

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## SIFTING THE ASHES OF HIP-PASSE



# 3 YEARS IN A BOHEMIAN TIME MACHINE

who are deliberately obscure, or who are involved in experiments which are intentionally risky, or unabashedly immature.

The accessibility of AS220's "FORUM" has stimulated many local artists operating in a narrow groove of obscurity to come out and experiment with more ambitious works- often in unfamiliar media. Thus we have seen dyed-in-the-wool rock n rollers produce evenings of head banging chamber music...visual artists (ostensibly making music) valiantly flaunting their inability to grasp tempo or chord changes. ...musicians doing stand up comedy decidedly less funny than their attempts at be-bop... poets farting in crystal bowls of perrier water. All punctuated by occasional visitations from guest luminaries who strum guitars with paintbrushes or let fly walls of exponentially notated feedback from electrified "portholes". Hours and hours of earsplitting dada musique interspersed with wonderful virtuoso performances of medieval rock n roll or computer pop tones. Primordial bongo banging and interminable Art-brut dramatic vignettes - all performed with a **sophomoric** zeal which inclines me to re-examine the pejorative connotation of that term.

Ah yes **SOPHOMORIC**, why is it exactly that

this is so universally employed as a withering demur? I don't get it. To me it merely connotes a state of mind where notions such as **truth** and **beauty** have yet to be distorted into their inevitable progeny...**Politesse** and **Taste**.

An advancement we would all be wise to avoid. After all, **DREAMS ARE THE STUFF** that post-modern beatniks, dyslexic shakespearians and garden variety art bums are made of. Dreams...yes, and also delusions. Seriously, **THERE'S AN ART TO BEING DELUSIONAL**. And here-in we find the truly engaging aspect of the AS220 experiment. **Why not pretend?** Success is subjective so why not pretend, What's the difference between pretending to be a performance artist and actually living performance art? A fancy theatre? A staggering endowment perhaps, but essentially, these days, the a la mode amounts to pretense. So why not pretend.

Once it was sufficient to sit in a refrigerator carton and pretend to be 20,000 leagues under the sea. Now many people think in order to be a really pretentious artist you need the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the National Endowment for the Arts.

**"NOT SO!"** say the time travellers in the cabaret of the oddly normal.

**"Let the audience pretend too"**

Pretend some dude from North Providence is John Cage. Pretend another guy from Woonsoquet is Alan Ginsburg. Pretend that honking, squawking cacaphony you hear is ,like, jazz or something. Forget what you have learned from special-effects-glutted popular entertainments. At AS220 you must suspend your disbelief **YOU MUST PRETEND**.

Otherwise you will find yourself sitting in the dark thinking.. "I could do that!" and then you'll have to ask yourself why you don't.

P.J.B. JULY 28 1988

**AS220**  
**BEAT CRITIQUE**  
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